

PRESS RELEASE

Patterson: Seashore land sale on hold

Public concerns about future access must be addressed

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AUSTIN — Negotiations to sell 3,680 acres of Permanent School Fund land north of Padre Island National Seashore will be put on hold until public concerns about future access can be addressed by officials with the National Parks Service, Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson said today.

“I have heard the concerns that people have and have decided to put these negotiations on hold until the National Park Service officials can specifically address public concerns about future access, including the use of bollards and driving on the beach,” Patterson said. “No one was talking about closing the beach to anyone, but it’s clear that people want to see specifics before we go forward.”

The sale of the property is now uncertain, “but public access must be preserved in order to consummate this deal.”

The property north of Padre Island National Seashore was purchased with federal transportation funds in 1995 by former Texas Land Commissioner Garry Mauro. Under terms of the agreement, the property was purchased to preserve the view of Padre Island National Seashore and could not be developed.

Since then, the property has become a haven for lawlessness, including illegal hunting, dumping and other unsavory activities that prompted public complaints. Since the property did not generate revenue for the state’s Permanent School Fund, Patterson had decided to begin negotiations with the Nature Conservancy, which wanted to buy the property and donate it to Padre Island National Seashore. The property contains nearly five miles of beach adjacent to the national seashore.

“The General Land Office works to make money for the Permanent School Fund,” Patterson said. “We’re not the parks department. We don’t have staff dedicated to managing large tracts of environmentally sensitive land like this.”

Under terms of the original purchase agreement, the General Land Office contributed 20 percent of the purchase price, with the remaining 80 percent being paid for with federal transportation funds. Because of this, any sale of the property would require approval by the Federal Highway Administration.

General Land Office officials will discuss the proposed sale further with state representatives J.M. Lozano and Todd Hunter, as well as county and city officials next week.

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